

**TESTIMONY BY DANA CONNORS
PRESIDENT, MAINE STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AND MEMBER, READYNATION**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE
ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

**IN SUPPORT OF LD 215
“AN ACT TO IMPROVE STUDENT RETENTION IN MAINE’S
POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS”**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2015
1 P.M., ROOM 202 CROSS STATE OFFICE BUILDING**

Chairman Langley, Chairman Kornfield, distinguish members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Dana Connors, President of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and a member of the business organization ReadyNation. I am pleased to be with you this afternoon to offer my support of LD 215 “An Act to Improve Student Retention in Maine’s Postsecondary Institutions.”

As you know, this bill proposes to expand the very successful Jobs for Maine’s graduate model into up to four pilots at Maine colleges/universities as another tool to help more at-risk students attain college degrees.

We know from the data that Jobs For Maine’s Graduates as been a very successful model to help Maine young people complete high school college- and career-ready. Currently Jobs for Maine’s graduates serves more than 5,000 public school students in grades 6-12 across 80 programs. Outcomes are proof that JMG’s is making the grade:

- The 4-year graduate rate for JMG students is consistently 90% or higher.
- 96% of JMG student return to school the following year.
- 85% of JMG students are either employed, in the military, or are continuing their education immediately following high school graduation.
- JMG students earn 14% more money than all other workers their age.

Since it’s inception in 1993, JMG has helped more than 28,000 Maine middle school and high school students, youth in foster care, and incarcerated youth overcome challenges and become reconnected and re-engaged in their school, their communities and the workforce. JMG provides not only academic supports but also the real life exposure to

Maine work places that is key for the development of critical deeper learning skills: the ability to master core academic content, think critically, solve problems, work collaboratively, communicate effectively and learn to learn. Every day I hear from Maine businesses that these skills are missing in the younger generation of workers.

Expanding JMG's highly successful program into Maine colleges and universities to help ensure that their high school participants receive similar supports and achieve similar successes in college is a logical and critical next step. The Maine State Chamber of Commerce and ReadyNation are pleased to support this effort and encourage this Committee, and all legislators, to embrace the private-public partnership it offers. I have every confidence that it will lead to solid outcomes for both Maine's young adults and our future workforce.